

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 7451

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TAGS: PFOR, XJ, IT, UR, AO, RH, SF, ZA, CG

SUBJ: USSR/ITALIAN BILATERALS ON AFRICA

SUMMARY. DURING RECENT TALKS WITH ITALIANS IN MOSCOW, SOVIET MFA AUTHORITIES ATTEMPTED TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF PEACEFUL AND MODERATE INTENT IN AFRICAN AFFAIRS. MESSAGE INTENDED WAS APPARENTLY THAT NO FURTHER USSR ADVENTURES OF THE ANGOLAN TYPE NEED BE ANTICIPATED IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS PART OF REGULAR SERIES OF HOME-AND-HOME ITALY/USSR BILATERAL EXCHANGES, SMALL ITALIAN DELEGATION VISITED MOSCOW APRIL 29 FOR A TOUR D'HORIZON OF AFRICA. FOLLOWING IS RESUME FROM AN ITALIAN PARTICIPANT.

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2. PROBLEM OF WEST SAHARA WAS RAISED BY SOVIETS. THEIR WORDS WERE OF MODERATION. THEY SUPPORTED SELF-DETERMINATION FOR SAHARAN PEOPLE AND CONSEQUENTLY HAD VOTED FOR ALGERIAN RESOLUTION. AT SAME TIME, SOVIETS SAW PROBLEM AS ONE OF GREAT DELICACY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST. THEY SAW SAHARA AS A POTENTIAL LEBANON, DIVISIVE OF THE ARABS AND BENEFICIAL TO ISRAEL. SOVIETS THEREFORE WERE MAKING MAXIMUM EFFORT WITH PARTIES TO KEEP DISPUTE FROM INTENSIFYING OR BROADENING. THEY ARE IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH ALGERIANS AND MOROCCANS, AND INTEND TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE RELATIONS. THEY FELT THEY HAVE HAD SOME RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON ALGERIANS. IN RECENT TALKS HASSAN II HAD REITERATED TO SOVS HIS REASONS FOR OPPOSING A REFERENDUM ON WESTERN SAHARA. AT SAME TIME HE "PROMISED" TO EXTEND UPCOMING MOROCCAN ELECTIONS INTO SAHARA WHERE THEY COULD BE A DE FACTO REFERENDUM. ANY SAHARAN COULD VOTE AGAINST HIM; ANYONE CLAIMING TO BE SAHARAN WOULD BE ALLOWED TO VOTE WITHOUT PRODUCING DOCUMENTS, AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS COULD BE INVITED. SOVIETS COMMENTED TO ITALIANS THAT THERE WASN'T MUCH NEW IN WHAT HASSAN HAD TO SAY, BUT WERE NOT PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF HIS POLICY. THEY ALSO SAID THEY WOULD NOT BE MORE CATHOLIC THAN THE POPE -- THEY WILL NOT RECOGNIZE POLISARIO OR THE SAHARAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC BEFORE LIBYA, WHICH WAS URGING USSR ON.

3. BRIEF DISCUSSIONS ON HORN CENTERED ON TFAI. SOVIETS SAID THEY "OBVIOUSLY" WANTED "FULL DECOLONIZATION" THERE BUT, BY IMPLICATION, NOT AT COST OF PEACE AND STABILITY IN AREA GENERALLY. SOVIETS WERE NOT DESIROUS OF SEEING INCREASED SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN TENSIONS AND SEEMED TO BE SAYING THAT THEY WERE DISCOUAGING SIAD FROM ADVENTURISM.

4. ITAIANS WENT ON THE POLITE OFFENSIVE CONCERNING SOUTHERN AFRICA. ITALY FELT, DURING ANGOLA'S FIRST BRIEF PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE, THAT ALL RPT ALL EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS, POLITICAL OR MILITARY, HAD BEEN ILLEGITIMATE. SOVIETS SAID THEIR ROLE WAS AT REQUEST OF LEGITIMATE (MPLA) GOVERNMENT. ITALIANS REPLIED THAT THAT GOVERNMENT HAD CERTAINLY NOT BEEN DEEMED LEGITIMATE BY AOU AT THE TIME. ITALIANS SAID THEY APPRECIATED USSR ROLE IN SA ALONG WITH WEST EUROPEANS, WHICH RESULTED IN REMOVAL OF SA TROOPS FROM ANGOLA. THEREAFTER, HOWEVER, THE REASONS FOR MAINTENANCE OF 12,000 CUBAN TROOPS THERE WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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"LESS CLEAR". SOVIETS SAID THERE WERE STILL EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC THREATS TO THE "SECOND REVOLUTION" AND, ANYWAY, PROBLEM WAS ONE TO BE DEALT WITH BY THE "TWO SOVEREIGN STATES" INVOLVED.

5. CONTINUING ON ANGOLA, SOVIETS SAID THEY FAVORED ITS FULL INDEPENDENCE, BUT ESPECIALLY "ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE". GOI WAS IN FAVOR OF INDEPENDENCE, TOO, BUT ESPECIALLY "MILITARY

AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE". GOI FELT THAT SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIONS COULD HAVE DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR WHOLE CONTINENT. FIRST, IT ENCOURAGED SOME HIGHLY NATIONALISTIC LEADERS TO THINK IN TERMS OF MILITARY SOLUTIONS TO SOME OF THEIR BORDER PROBLEMS, WITH EXTRA-CONTINENTAL ASSISTANCE. THIS MAKES THE PROSPECTS OF NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS CONDUCIVE TO UNITY MORE DIFFICULT. LAST, IT TEMPTED LEADERS TO THINK IN TERMS OF ARMAMENTS RATHER THAN DEVELOPMENT. SOVIETS REPORTEDLY SAID THEY AGREED WITH MUCH OF THE ITALIAN LOGIC, AND THAT SUCH TRENDS NEED BE AVOIDED.

5. RUSSIANS NOTED AND APPROVED ITALIAN INTEREST IN FULLER RELATIONS WITH ANGOLA; E.G., NEWLY-NAMED AMBASSADOR, ROME-LUANDA FLIGHTS, ETC. THEY SAID THEY HOPED ANGOLA WOULD DEVELOP NORMAL RELATIONS WITH ALL STATES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES. THE COUNTRY IS FULL OF RESOURCES AND IN NEED OF HELP TO DEVELOP THEM.

7. SOVIETS PLED INNOCENCE ON CHARGE THAT THEY HAD BEEN BEHIND GHANAIAN CANCELLATION OF KISSINGER VISIT. THEY ACKNOWLEDGED GHANA AND NIGERIA HAD BEEN "HELPFUL" ON ANGOLA BUT SAID THEY WERE "BEGINNING TO HAVE IDEAS OF THEIR OWN" ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

8. COMMENT. OUR SOURCE SAID THAT, ONCE AGAIN, SOVIET POSITION ON ANGOLA HAD BEEN OF MODERATION. RUSSIANS SEEMED TO BE A LITTLE OF THE DEFENSIVE, HOWEVER, AND NOT VERY HAPPY WITH SUCCESS OF KISSINGER AFRICAN TOUR. A BIT CHAGRINED, MAYBE, "NOW THAT KISSINGER IS BEGINNING TO DO THE RIGHT THINGS" IN AFRICA.

9. MODERATION WAS AGAIN SOVIET THEME ON RHODESIA. A POLITICAL SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY, WITH INCREASED ECONOMIC

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PRESSURE THE KEY. WOULD BE WATCHING TO SEE IF WEST DOES ITS LEVEL BEST. ONLY IF PEACEFUL MEANS FAIL WOULD VIOLENCE BECOME NECESSARY. AS FOR INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS, USSR SUPPORTS NKOMO WHO IS MODERATE, WELL-QUALIFIED AND THE BEST OF THE LOT. HE MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN KEEP BLACK RHODESIANS TOGETHER SINCE SITHOLE IS DISCREDITED AND ISOLATED. MOZAMBIANS FEEL THAT A LONG WAR IN RHODESIA IS NECESSARY SO THAT, OVER TIME, BLACK RHODESIANS ARE SENSITIZED AND THE "CONDITIONS FOR SOCIAL REVOLUTION" ARE WELL-ESTABLISHED. SOVIETS OPPOSE THIS POINT OF VIEW AND HOPE FOR A RAPID SOLUTION.

10. COMMENT: OUR PERCEPTIVE SOURCE SAID THAT HE FELT THAT THE USSR HOPED TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE WEST BY THESE TALKS. IN GENERAL THEY SEEMED TO BE INTIMATING GOOD BEHAVIOUR FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, NO CURRENT INTENT TO REPEAT THE

ANGOLAN EPISODE AND TO ASSURE THAT AFRICAN FRICTIONS DO'T
UNRAVEL THE THREADS OF DETENTE. THE USSR WANTED TIME FOR THE
ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT TO BEGIN TO RESOLVE ITS PROBLEMS AND WAS
WILLING, EVEN ANXIOUS, THAT THE WEST MOVE IN, TO HELP WITH
DEVELOPMENT AND THE HELP "SPLIT THE BILL". VOLPE

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